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## CHRISTIAN SOCIOLOGY.

### INTRODUCTION.

#### I.

THE term Christian Sociology is unfortunate in certain of its applications. The names of many sciences may be used in two ways: (1) they may indicate the method by which results are obtained, and (2) they may indicate the formulation of such results. Thus history may be a method science or it may be a descriptive science. In the former case it would be absurd to unite with it any word having a moral content. A method of investigation may be ill or well fitted to produce the best results, but ethically it can be neither good nor bad. The same is perhaps even clearer of such objective sciences as chemistry and geology. To speak of a Christian method of sociological investigation is quite as impossible. The investigation of social forces and results, the discovery of the true nature of society, can no more have an ethical—still less religious—character than the study of a crystal or a chemical compound.

But in the other sense in which the name of a science is used, no such criticism can hold. The moment an investigator attempts to formulate his results in propositions, that moment he injects into them his own characteristics. While the method of investigation may be morally neutral, the statement and the application of its results may be largely tinged with ethics. This is less obvious in the case of physical sciences, but admittedly true of the social. Thus in a true sense there may be a Christian view of history, and, so to speak, a Christian history. This is even more obvious in the case of philosophy. In this sense of the formulation and application of results derived by Christian students, sociology may be said to be Christian.

It is, however, not altogether clear that such a terminology

though permissible is advisable. Historically, at any rate, the term is at a disadvantage. The champions of some so-called Christian sociology are dangerously open to criticism similar to that which Voltaire passed upon the Holy Roman Empire—"It is neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire." It certainly is desirable that an end should come to such pious christening of scientific progeny of at best very questionable parentage. With all due allowance for its analogy with other scientific terminology, we bespeak for the term a more definite and positive definition.

This desired definition is to be found in the use of the word Christian as parallel with such adjectives as Hegelian, Aristotelian, Baconian. Just as the philosophies bearing these names are respectively the gifts of Hegel and Aristotle and Bacon, so Christian sociology should mean the *sociology of Christ*; that is, the social philosophy and teachings of Christ. In this restricted sense the term is both legitimate and capable of an at least tentatively scientific content.

It may be objected that no such philosophy and teachings exist—that Jesus was a teacher of religion and morals and that beyond the realm of these subjects his words are as few as those concerning biology or historical criticism. Such a view, however, is not easily tenable. While it is evident that Jesus has given us no system of social teachings, he certainly was no more a systematic theologian than he was a sociologist. And, *a priori*, it would be a singular phenomenon if Christian teaching and life which has everywhere effected the most remarkable social changes should itself be possessed of no sociological content. It is not altogether a reply to say that good men must necessarily produce social improvements. Good Brahmans in India have not greatly elevated women, and good Greeks in Athens supported slavery. Advance in civilization has not been accomplished by simply producing individuals of high religious and moral character. Since the days when the law went forth forbidding the branding of criminals, Christian impulses have been quite as much social as individual. The yeast of the Kingdom has been quite as

much political as personal. Is it altogether impossible that He whose teachings have upturned empires and founded new civilizations should have been altogether unsuspecting of the social and political forces that lay within his words?

The obstacles to an appreciation of such a possibility are mainly two :

(1) Since the the Reformation the theological and exegetical study of the New Testament has been largely dominated by an individualistic philosophy. The chief aim of theology has been the discovery of an explanation of the "salvation" of each individual believer. A new man and not a new society has been the objective point of most preaching. If sometimes the theologian has been forced into a belief in the solidarity of the race, it has really been that he might have a major premise on which to base his restricted conclusion as to the fate of the individual. Such a point of view, was inevitable. No man can escape the *zeitgeist*. But in thus rightly insisting upon the need of saving faith on the part of every man, our religious teachers have to a considerable degree overlooked the essential sociability of human nature, and unconsciously have developed exegetical presumptions that have biased interpretation. Scriptural teachings have been applied to men as if they were insulated entities, and to society as if it were but an aggregation of easily separated wholes.

The results of such presuppositions are no less unfortunate than inevitable. They have affected not merely the conception of the position of the church in the world, but they have also narrowed Christian truth to a field in which Jesus never meant it to remain, and to which the early Christians did not limit it. Perhaps today's thought is swinging to the other extreme, but at the worst, modern conceptions of man and society are calculated to offset the unmodified individualism of the past. Whether for weal or woe, the underlying premises of the social sciences that isolation is abnormality and that society is itself an object of study promise some day to prove as revolutionary in biblical interpretation as was the new conception of the worth of the individ-

ual in the sixteenth century. Philosophy, it is true, should never dictate interpretation. But no conscientious exegete would dare claim absolute immunity from its influence. The results of the past may thus be supplemented by those of the present. The future of a man is known; the future of mankind is now to be discovered. And this discovery will in no small way spring from a new appreciation of the teachings of Jesus.

(2) A second obstacle in the way of formulating the social teachings of Jesus is the impatient and over-zealous publication of certain doctrines that are called Christian, but which are based, not upon exegesis, but upon a philanthropy largely unrestrained in both its prejudices and its rhetoric. Disregarding the mischievous tendency for every good man to dub as "sociology" his hasty thinking and hopes as to society; disregarding the refreshing certainty enjoyed by many earnest though amateur reformers that in the preparation of milleniums the accumulation of figures and statistics is wholly superfluous; disregarding the fact that much so-called sociological teaching is nothing more than relabelled ethics; granting that sociologies are as easy to produce as political panaceas, the fact remains that as yet Christian sociology has been at the mercy of men who have mistaken what they think Christ ought to have taught for what he really did teach. Nothing is easier for the brain fertile in generalities and for the heart burning with sympathy and indignation than to evolve a system from a sentence or a term. In this particular Christian sociology is re-running the career of Christian theology. As the dogmatic theologian has too often made a system of philosophy masquerade as a theology by dressing it out with a series of more or less well-fitting proof-texts, so too often modern prophets to a degenerate church, in sublime indifference to the context, time of authorship, and purpose of a New Testament book, and with an equal neglect of the personal peculiarity and vocabulary of a New Testament writer, have set forth as the word of Christianity views which were but bescriptured social denunciation and vision. If this be Christian sociology, it is little wonder that the genuine, albeit less inspired, student of social phe-

nomena and Christian teaching should view it with suspicion and question the worth of an attempt to discover any such phantasmagoria in the words of the Teacher of Nazareth.

## II.

There is but one way to the apprehension of the teachings of Jesus, whether religious or social, and that is the patient study of the gospels with the aid of all modern critical and exegetical methods. The only thoroughly safe method is the inductive gathering of teachings from the gospel sources, and their subsequent classification into a system. Here, as in all scientific processes, the aim of the investigator must be the discovery of what is, not the substantiation of some notion as to what ought to be. It is even unsafe, as a first step, to gather only such passages as may serve as the basis of a particular doctrine. The first question is not *what* sociology did Jesus teach, but *whether* he taught anything that may properly be called sociological. Classification must logically, and generally chronologically, succeed discovery and interpretation. Let all the materials for a social teaching first be gathered. Then, whether they be few or many, let them be shaped into a system.

Such a method is not peculiar to the study of the New Testament. It is that by which one may gain the system of any writer who has himself not arranged his thoughts in a logical system. To such a method the words of Jesus are as the words of Plato. The greatest reverence that may be shown them is to treat them as if they needed no exegetical odds, but were both intelligible and capable of enduring rigid scrutiny.

But in such a method the words of Christ have more than an archæological or devotional import. No man's teaching has equaled his in the magnitude of its social results, and there are messages in his words yet to be heard. The sociologist who disregards the teachings of Christ is as unscientific as he who in the history of philosophy should neglect Plato and Kant, or in the history of the United States of America should disregard the Constitution. But quotation is not exegesis, and rhetoric is not

classification. If Jesus is to figure among sociologists, before he is cited as an authority let him at least be understood. And if he is to be debarred from the class of social teachers, let it first be remembered that much which is put forth as his is no more from him than the schoolman's gloss was from Aristotle.

### III.

The sources from which it is possible to draw the social teachings of Jesus are primarily, though not exclusively, his own words. At first glance, therefore, no problem could seem easier than the process of gaining such teachings. With most theologians of the past, with many of today, the *ipsissima verba* of the Master are an end of all discussion. But even if we disregard the possible changes incident to one or more processes of translation, it is a prime necessity that the interpreter remember that thought is superior to word, and that a sentence wrenched from its context may be quite as misleading as a similarly detached word. The thought of Jesus is sometimes so genuinely Oriental as to elude any process of interpretation that is purely verbal. His style is so concrete, and his similes so perfect that there is a constant temptation to forget that a parable, after all, can teach only an analogy, and that the real teaching of its author lies not in its form but in the analogy. Further than this, Jesus seldom combined complementary or mutually modifying thoughts. He was not a systematic lecturer, but a creator of impulses. He sometimes puts forth a proposition so categorically as to make it appear that it exhausts his teachings upon the subject, and yet under some other circumstances its modification is expressed with equal absoluteness. The two superficially appear contradictory. In reality they are the two hemispheres of the truth. To claim either of them alone as his teaching is to do Jesus injustice. His real teaching can be gained only through their combination. For this reason, so far as a systematized and complete statement is concerned, outside of the magnificent summaries into which Jesus has compressed the essentials of religion and morals, no one can claim to have mastered Christian teaching until he has mastered its entirety. The

failure to observe this simple caution lies at the bottom of much of the heresy and sectarianism of the centuries, and of no little crude religious teaching today.

It is therefore, above all, necessary to study the words of Jesus not only as detached maxims, but as the scattered parts of a complete system.

At this point one naturally meets the question, Are the teachings of Jesus commensurate with the teachings of the entire New Testament? In a certain sense it is perhaps true that Christian doctrine is thus commensurate. Waiving in this discussion the question of the inspiration of the apostolic writers, it is yet reasonable to hold that in the teachings that emanated from the companions of Jesus we have that which must be regarded as expressive of the spirit and purpose of Christ. Nevertheless, it would be contrary not only to the most ordinary processes of historical study but also to the testimony of Christian consciousness to make no distinction between the social teachings of the gospels and those of the epistles. In the latter we have the application of the former to the needs of the growing Christian societies of the first century. In some cases these applications are clearly adapted only to the peculiar circumstances of those early years. At all events, it is very apparent that in the passage from the social teachings of the four gospels to those of the other New Testament writings, we are passing from a constitution to statutory law, from principle to attempted realization of principle, from philosophy to conduct. For this reason, following the historical method of the recent science of biblical theology, it is better to confine the search for the data of Christian sociology, as it is defined above, to the gospel narrative and its brief continuation in the opening section of the Acts.

Yet even here the circle whence these data are to come must be slightly restricted. Wholly apart from the question as to the origin and mutual relations of the four gospels, it is beyond dispute that in their present form the accounts they contain are the work of writers who lived in at least the second generation after the death of Jesus. The component parts of each gospel may be



shown to date from the contemporaries of Jesus, and it is possible that at least three of the accounts were brought into their present literary form by these contemporaries themselves. Yet however this may be, the gospels now clearly contain two elements: the teachings of Jesus, and the editorial material added to them by their writers.

This second element is considerable in the Fourth Gospel, but by no means wanting in the synoptics. It is of various sorts, but may be mostly classified as introductions, transpositions, explanations, reflections, prophetic antitypes, and verbal changes. Many of these are self-evident to the careful reader, and most are easily separated from the teachings of Jesus by simple processes of criticism. Their value is considerable, however, for the understanding of Jesus' own positions, upon which they form a sort of commentary or scholium. In few cases will their separation affect the force of the passage from which they are taken, but it is evident that such a separation might at times be of service in appreciating the teaching of Jesus himself.

One form of editorial work not specified above is, however, of the utmost value as a source of the social teachings of Jesus—the narrative of his life. In most cases such narrative is demonstrably from eyewitnesses and in its essential elements is beyond suspicion. From such narrative data may be drawn of equal importance with those contained in the words of Jesus. His example and life, quite as much as his spoken teachings, have universally been accepted as a basis for Christian doctrine, but nowhere are they of more importance than in the sphere of his sociology. No student of the life of Jesus would venture to predicate inconsistency between his outward act and his inward belief. It is impossible to think of him, simply as an honest man, practicing that which he would forbid his followers. In certain cases, it is true, he did accommodate himself to circumstances and demands that he regarded as peculiar and even unjust, but seldom without specific explanation or comment. Speaking generally, the doings of Jesus, when once viewed in the light of their attending circumstances, quite as much as his words, are

materials from which to construct a systematized statement of his social teachings.

There is another source of such teaching which, though negative, is not to be disregarded—the silence of Jesus on many points upon which the age in which he lived was interested quite as much as is our own. For example, such social evils as slavery, gambling, prostitution, are unassailed in the gospel narrative. So far as many deeper social and political questions are concerned Jesus was also silent. This fact is not only remarkable, it is significant of a distinct element in what we venture to call his social philosophy. Just what this element was does not concern us here. It is enough to call attention to the fact and to suggest that a vocalization of this silence be it with never so eloquent a philosophy or never so ingenious play upon words and texts is to make exposition presuppose, if not dangerously resemble, imposition.

#### IV.

If one adopts the conventional division of the study of sociology—descriptive, static and dynamic—it at once becomes evident that little that can be termed descriptive sociology is to be found within the gospels. Jesus was not a student of society in the technical use of the term. His interest in publicans and sinners was not simply scientific. His work was not that of the investigator, but of the revealer and inspirer. It is impossible to think of him as laboriously gathering material for a treatise upon social phenomena—a measurer of foreheads and a compiler of statistics. Not only was the age in which he lived innocent of any such scientific processes, but the whole career of Jesus makes it evident that while no man—not even Socrates—ever possessed a keener perception of human nature alike in its strength and weakness, his main effort was the presentation of ideals and the gift of spiritual powers through which they might be attained. For this reason any systematized presentation of his teachings must content itself with a very incomplete and incidental presentation of his views of humanity as it

is, and devote itself almost exclusively to his conceptions of what society may become, and the means and process through which its desired consummation may be reached.

In the present series of papers a pioneering attempt will be made to set forth, (1) the Christian ideal of man, society, the family, the state, social life (in the narrower sense), wealth, the church; and (2) the dynamics of progress—that is, the forces, the means, and the process that make these ideals realizable.

SHAILER MATHEWS.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO.